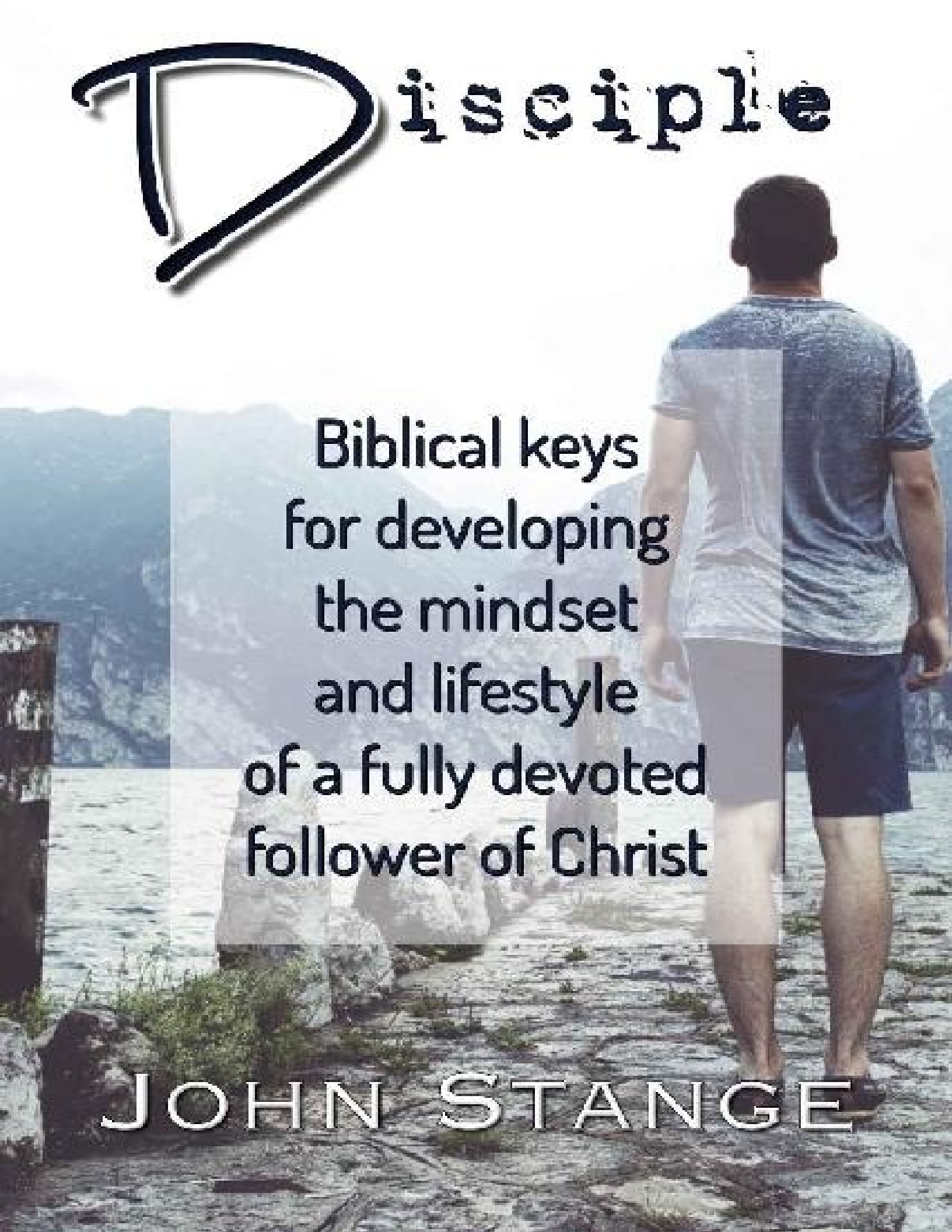
Disciple



Biblical keys
for developing
the mindset
and lifestyle
of a fully devoted
follower of Christ

JOHN STANGE

Disciple

Biblical keys for developing the mindset and lifestyle of a fully devoted follower of Christ

by
John Stange

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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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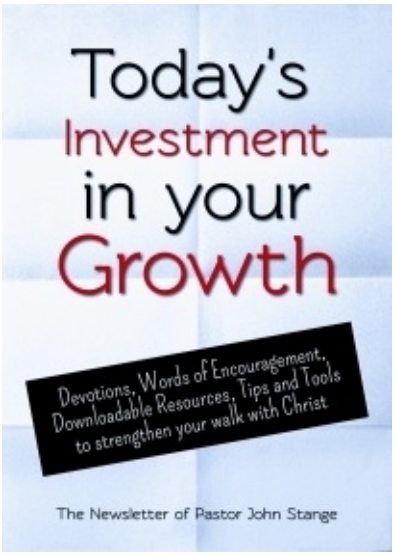
Wrapping Up

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Some Verses on Discipleship for Encouragement and Inspiration

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Getting Started

The term "disciple" is an important biblical term that often gets overlooked. It comes from the Greek word "mathétés" which means to be a learner or a pupil. In the context of our faith, a disciple would be one who eagerly learns from Jesus.

What then would a disciple of Christ be learning? If we are His disciples, we would be learning to follow Jesus, imitate His life and pass on His teachings to others. This is because Christ's calling on His disciples is not only that we would become disciples, but that we would mentor and teach others so that they too would become His disciples.

Just prior to His ascension to Heaven, Jesus spoke to His disciples and the Scriptures record the conversation like this;

> *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*
> ***-Matthew 28:18-20***

Jesus desires more than just people who casually profess to believe in Him. He's seeking to build a family of fully devoted followers who genuinely trust Him. Men and women who delight in their relationship with Him. People who love to learn and implement His teaching. A group of people who love and are loved by Jesus and their lives make that abundantly clear.

How can we become disciples who are fully devoted followers of Christ?

Chapter 1
A Disciple is Called By Jesus

I. Follow me

> *While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him.*
> ***-Matthew 4:18-20***

Growing up, I went fishing from time to time, but not very much. I don't enjoy eating fish so the idea of catching them never stuck with me. My sons don't really eat fish either, but when they have the opportunity to do so, they cast a line from time to time in the Neshaminy Creek with one of their friends and they usually have a good time doing it. They throw back what they catch.

This Scripture tells us that Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is a rather large lake and it's plenty deep. The people who lived in the region around the lake tended to be adept at fishing. My understanding is that fishing was the main trade and source of income for the communities that surrounded the Sea of Galilee at the time.

As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers who were fishermen. They were casting their nets into the water and doing their best to bring in as many fish as they could catch. This was their trade. This was their livelihood. It would be safe to assume that this is precisely what they expected to be doing most days for the rest of their lives. But Jesus called them that day. And they said "yes" to following Him.

When we read **John 1:35-42**, we learn that this wasn't the first time Jesus spoke to these men.

> *The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them,"Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth*

hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said,"You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).
-John 1:35-42

Jesus called these men to follow Him. And we're told that they listened to His voice, left their nets and followed Him, becoming His disciples and then later being granted the office of apostle.

Jesus wants us to be His disciples as well and part of what that entails is our willingness to follow Him. Jesus is God in the flesh. He is the epitome of leadership and a good leader incorporates multiple things in his style of leadership. One of the things that you'll notice about a good leader is that he doesn't send you off in a direction by yourself. Rather, he invites you to follow him. He doesn't push you away, he welcomes you to get closer to him and then move in the same direction he's moving.

That's the kind of leadership we see in Christ. We're invited to follow Him. We're invited to head in the same direction He's headed in. We're reminded that He will be with us always and won't abandon us. But if we're going to follow Him, it needs to be on His terms, not our own. It needs to be His voice we're heeding, not our own voice.

I don't know if you've ever heard the Dave Ramsey show via podcast or on the radio. He gives financial advice from a Christian perspective and he has outlined a simple plan for eliminating debt, investing and giving that he encourages his listeners to follow. From time to time, people will call in, say they have been following his plan, then mention how they are "mostly" following his plan, just not in certain areas like credit card usage or car loans. At that point, Dave will inevitably say, "It sounds like you're following your plan, not mine, because my plan encourages you never to do that."

In a similar way, Christ has invited us to follow Him. That doesn't mean we make changes to what He says or only follow Him on days when we don't feel like fishing. It means we leave our nets (whatever has the propensity to trap or entangle us), listen to His voice, and move in the direction He's moving which

we can be certain will be in a direction that's different from where our boats were already drifting.

II. I will make you something new

> *And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."*
> ***-Matthew 4:19***

Please notice a few things about Christ's call on the disciples. He told them to, "*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*" What was Jesus getting at when He said this? Jesus was telling them that their life was going to be quite different from how it was before they followed Him. He was about to give them a new mission and He was going to make them into new people.

His invitation to follow Him was that they would now follow Him as His disciples. He would be their master, teacher, leader and Lord and they would experience a transformation of life as they grew in their relationship with Him.

He also said, "*I will make you fishers of men.*" This is an interesting statement that shows that Jesus was using a concept that would have been familiar to this group of fishermen. They were used to understanding the activity and patterns of fish. Then knew the best time of day to look for them. They utilized the best tools they could use to catch them. Now their mission was going to change. They would be made into new people with new eyes and new priorities and their mission on this earth was going to change accordingly.

I started using a new piece of equipment at the gym recently that I hope will aid me in my ongoing battle with my Dad-belly. It's the stair climber. I started using it recently and at first I thought, "This isn't too bad." Then, fifteen seconds later when I couldn't breathe because I started it on too fast of a setting I realized, "This is going to be an intense workout." Could it be the magic bullet for getting rid of my belly? I guess we'll see. All I know is that I slept quite soundly that night because I was exhausted.

Exercise can certainly improve my health. A healthy life includes improvement, but when we dig a little into what Jesus was saying here, He revealed that our deepest health isn't dependent on "self-improvement". Rather, it's dependent on transformation that He accomplishes through faith in Him, by the Holy Spirit who indwells all believers. Jesus transforms the way we think, see and live. He isn't calling us to be an improved version of our old self. He's calling us to be and do something new.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
-Ephesians 2:10

III. Your life will change

> *And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*
> ***-Matthew 4:21-22***

Growing up, there were certain things that were expected of me and certain things I expected of myself. My full name is John N. Stange IV. My Great-Grandfather, John N. Stange Sr. started a grocery business, Jr. continued it, III expanded it and from birth, I was raised in it. I wanted to be just like my Dad and just like my Grandfathers. I walked around in that store with a meat apron on, sliced meat when I was still in elementary school, stocked the shelves, ran the register, cleaned the meat department and delivered groceries when I was old enough to drive.

My father tells me, however, that I broke his heart when I was 10-years-old and told him that I thought God wanted me to do something different and be a pastor. I was raised to run a family business then God called me away from it. Thankfully, he now sees that this was God's mission for my life.

Zebedee was a prominent fisherman. He had a well established business with some high profile customers. We're told that his business was doing well enough that he had hired servants in addition to his sons on the boat.

> *And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.*
> ***-Mark 1:20***

Some theologians believe that Zebedee had the contract to supply the high priest with fish and we can see from **John 18:15** that Zebedee's son, John, was certainly known to the high priest.

> *Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest,*
> ***-John 18:15***

As Jesus continued to call disciples, I'm sure those disciples were tempted to remain right where they were, particularly people like James and John who could have continued to lead and inherit their father's prosperous business. And that would have been fine if that's what Christ called them to do. But Jesus called them to leave the comfort, familiarity and prosperity of their father's boat and follow Him instead. From that point on, their lives were never the same.

One of the basic marks of a disciple of Christ is the fact that their life has changed. We all have stories of what our lives were like before we met Christ and it's fascinating to observe the long tail of what Christ has been doing in us and changing about us over the course of decades. But it's also edifying to hear stories and testimonies of what Christ has been doing in our lives or teaching us over shorter spans of time like the past month.

Has your life been changed? If you are truly Christ's disciple, the answer is absolutely yes. Or, do you feel like you're still living like you're spiritually dead? When you're battling between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit, who do you submit your will to? Christ who transforms you or this world that deforms you?

Christ's calling on your life and my life is so much higher than the standards this world drives into our minds. He calls us to follow Him, be made new by Him and to experience a life that is change by Him for good.

Chapter 2

A Disciple Puts Jesus First in all Areas of Life

I. Set your mind on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus

> *And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said,"Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*
> ***-Mark 8:31-33***

At this point in His ministry, Jesus had shown His disciples many things. They witnessed Him miraculously feed thousands of people on two occasions. They saw Him miraculously heal a blind man and restore his sight. They witnessed His confrontations and disagreements with the religious leaders of the time and Peter had even come to the point where he was prompted by the Holy Spirit to confess that Jesus was the Christ.

Now, Jesus was going to prepare His disciples for some deeper teaching. He wanted them to be informed about who He was and what His mission in this world would entail. He didn't want them to live their lives in perpetual ignorance of deeper spiritual truth. And the Scripture tells us here that Jesus spoke to them "plainly."

Let me speak about the word "plainly" for just a moment. I have been in many churches and in many educational environments throughout my life. And I have sat under the teaching of various teachers, professors and pastors. In some instances, I have become convinced that the person doing the teaching was more concerned with impressing their students with their knowledge than they were with making sure those in their hearing actually learned something.

Jesus teaches us very deep things in His word, but He intentionally does so in ways that are accessible and understandable. If you find yourself in a position to teach, preach or communicate, please take note of His example. Your goal should never be to impress others with your understanding of ancient languages or complex doctrines. Your goal shouldn't be to use the most complicated words you can find in your thesaurus. Your goal should be the same goal as that of Jesus. Namely, that those in your hearing would come to an understanding of truth, particularly the most important truth - His gospel.

Jesus made that clear to His hearers. He told them that He would suffer during the course of His earthly life, be rejected by those who should have worshipped Him, be killed and then rise again to life. This was of first importance and this is what He wanted them to set their minds upon.

> *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,*
> **-1 Corinthians 15:3-4**

But the disciples' minds, unfortunately, were still consumed with earthly things. In fact, Peter was critical of Jesus for teaching them this information. He was critical in part because they were more eager for Jesus to rule as a political king than rescue humanity as a sacrificial Savior. They cared more about power than they cared about salvation at this point and Jesus rebuked Peter because at that point, Peter's mind was consumed with worldly priorities that reflected the ambitions of Satan more so than the holy, life-giving mind of God.

What are our minds consumed with? As disciples of Christ, are our minds set on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus or are there still things of greater importance to us? We can set our minds on the ungodly priorities that the rest of this world is running after or we can be focused on what the Scriptures say is of "first importance."

II. We "come after" Jesus

> *And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?*
> ***-Mark 8:34-37***

In this world, there are things that taste delicious. Most of those things, in my opinion, are fried and I'm tempted by just about all of them. For a long time, people would joke with me about my love for Chick-fil-A's fried chicken sandwiches and that love is still there, but I have found a new source of temptation that is becoming just as hard to resist. The "orange chicken" with chow mein noodles at Panda Express hits the sweet spot in my palate. Lately,however, I haven't been going there for lunch. I promised myself that I would eat better and I succeeded, but by nature, I don't find it easy to "deny myself" foods that I enjoy eating.

Scripture, however, speaks of denying ourselves in a deeper and more consequential context. Jesus wants to be first in my life and in your life. He invites us to "come after" Him which means we would put Him first and follow Him. And for that to be the case, He also says I will need to deny myself and take up my cross. I need to put aside my selfish interests and I need to be willing to put up with whatever suffering I may need to endure in this world for the sake of Christ and His gospel.

If I try to hold on to my life, I will lose it. If I give myself over to Jesus and receive new life through faith in Him, I'll live forever. If I lose my earthly life for the sake of Christ and His gospel, I haven't lost anything that I wasn't going to lose anyway because there is nothing in this world that compares with the joy of eternal life in His presence. There is nothing in this world that I can offer in exchange for eternal life.

This is what Jesus was trying to convey to His listeners in this passage. He was calling the crowd to come and hear this. He was inviting them to become His disciples, but sadly, for many people, when the gospel is presented in these honest and frank terms, they come to believe that the price is too steep to follow

Jesus and they struggle to "come after" Him because they would rather come before Him and their lives make that abundantly clear.

The beautiful thing about what Jesus reveals here is that the exchange He invites us to make is completely worth it. To stop idolizing the very things we will have to give up someday anyway in return for becoming a fully devoted follower of Christ is always worth it.

III. Are we ashamed of Jesus or do we delight in Him?

> *For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."*
>
> ***-Mark 8:38***

At every stage of life, there are people you might want to impress. To be honest, and this probably isn't always a healthy thing, I often have the desire to impress my wife and kids. I care about them and I care about their opinions and perspectives.

When I was growing up, my primary concern was impressing my immediate peers, but even more so, several friends who were just a few years older than me. And I remember struggling with the fact that they did not approve of my desire to follow Jesus. They ridiculed me for it. They made jokes about me attending worship services at church or working at a Christian summer camp. It hurt, but I was faced with the choice to either openly acknowledge my faith in Jesus or pretend I didn't believe in Him. He gave me peace about acknowledging my faith in Him and He gave me strength to withstand the ridicule. (I now believe that part of God's will in that experience was to prepare me for criticism or ridicule that I might receive as an adult in pastoral leadership).

Jesus doesn't want people to be ashamed of Him and He tells us here that our shame or lack of shame regarding our relationship with Him reveals much about the nature of our relationship with Him. If we are ashamed of Him, do we really know Him? I believe that as we truly come to know Him, we won't be ashamed of Him, but rather, we will delight in Him and in our relationship with Him. We'll delight in the joy He brings to our lives. We'll delight in the hope He secures for our future. We'll delight in the fact that in the midst of every trial we face, we're blessed with both His help and His presence.

It is my belief that if a person lives their life in perpetual shame of Jesus, they don't have a personal relationship with Him and can therefore expect the outcome Jesus speaks about in these verses. Jesus reminds us that He will be returning again, not in the mild manner He displayed when He came the first

time, but in the glory of God the Father. Jesus will be returning with the holy angels to judge the earth. He will grant eternal life to all who trust in Him and condemn all who were ashamed of Him and rejected Him, to eternal punishment in a place the Scriptures refer to as the Lake of Fire.

> *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'*
>
> *"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*
> ***-Matthew 25:31-46***

All that to say, the fact that Jesus allowed this truth to reach you today tells me that He's pleading with your heart to **put Him first in your life**. He's seeking to

break the chains of Satan and remove the spiritual blindness that we have all once tried to walk in. He's inviting us to **set our minds** on His life, death and resurrection. To recognize that He comes first and **we come after Him**. And that **we don't need to be ashamed of Him** or His words, but rather we can openly delight in Him as the one who has brought us from death and certain condemnation to life and eternal joy.

Chapter 3

A Disciple Obeys the Words of Christ

I. Remain faithful to the word of Christ

> *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"*
> ***-John 8:31-33***

Parenting is an interesting experience and different seasons of parenting provide new and unique challenges. At present, we are teaching our oldest to drive, but it feels like only yesterday we were teaching her to walk. In some ways, we feel like we're at a sweet spot in parenting because our kids are getting older and they need much less direct supervision. One of our household principles that I insist on as their father is that if they listen to what I say, even when I'm not present to enforce it, they will be granted additional freedom and liberty. If they don't, I will take those liberties away (phones, leaving the house, etc.).

Jesus strongly desires that we as His family listen to and are obedient to what He says. This is one of the marks of a disciple and this is a major part of what Jesus told the apostles to teach others to value. He told them to teach others to *"observe all that I have commanded you."* (Matt. 28:20). And that's the message Jesus was communicating to the group that are referenced in this portion of the Gospel of John.

Jesus told them that, *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,"*. What does that statement mean? What did He mean by using the word "abide"? To abide in this context literally means to obey what He taught and to live your life accordingly. But human nature tends to bristle against that kind of declaration. By nature, I would rather do whatever I want to do. I don't typically jump up and down and get excited about following someone else's commands and you probably don't either.

The problem is that we tend to associate following the directions of someone else with the loss of our personal freedom. If you work for someone, how often have you daydreamed about "being your own boss?" When you were still a child living at home, how many times did you said to yourself, "When I'm a parent, I won't be so tough or picky with my kids." We think following directions is some form of personal prison. In fact, that appears to be the way

the group Jesus was speaking to thought as well.

But that's not the case at all. Jesus said, *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* Yet after hearing this, the crowd took offense. To imply that they weren't free sounded to them like Jesus was equating them with slaves and they insisted that their people had never been slaves of anyone, which is somewhat ironic considering the fact that their ancestors had been slaves to the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians and they were now under Roman occupation.

But Jesus was telling them and us the truth. By nature, we are slaves to sin, but when we come to know the truth, the truth sets us free. In speaking about knowing the truth, Jesus wasn't speaking about knowing data or what could be learned by merely observing nature. He was speaking about knowing the ultimate form of divine revelation which was Himself. He was revealing to them that to know the truth was to know Jesus because Jesus is the truth. Those who know Him are set free from their slavery to sin, Satan and death.

> *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*
> ***-John 14:6***

The better we know Him, the more we appreciate who He is and what He has done. The more we appreciate who He is and what He has done, the greater our love grows for Him. The greater our love is for Him, the more we value remaining faithful to what He has taught.

II. Your life will reveal who or what is your master

> *Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father."*
> ***-John 8:34-38***

Since the dawn of the smartphone, my wife and I have utilized the calendar app to sync all of our activity. If she enters something on her calendar, it automatically shows up on my phone as well. This is also why I dislike the start of the school year. With four children, it feels like there are thousands of things that get plugged into that calendar and so much of it revolves around the school district. From time to time, our family needs to assess everything that's creating a demand on our time and simply say, "NO! We will not be attending that event, joining that club or playing that sport." Our calendars are a glimpse of what matters to us and what masters us. The way we spend our lives will reveal who or what is our master.

Jesus makes this clear in these verses. He reveals that what we practice as a pattern of our lives will show who or what we live subservient to. If we practice sin, we are slaves to sin because sin has mastered us. If we trust in Him, however, and put His teaching into practice as an act of love, we show that Christ is our Lord. And Jesus delights to set people free from slavery to sin.

But can someone experience spiritual freedom if they won't even acknowledge their need for it? That was part of the struggle Jesus was having with this group of people. They weren't convinced they were slaves to sin. They didn't believe that was an issue for them. Their hope was in their forefather Abraham, not in Christ. They believed that since Abraham believed God and was called the friend of God, Abraham's relationship and standing with God would be automatically transmitted to them, regardless of the condition of their hearts or the nature of their faith.

So Jesus did them a big, offensive favor. He loved them so much that he popped their bubble of false belief. He dared to say to them that Abraham wasn't their

father, the devil was and that would become clear soon enough when they tried to kill Him. He was saying that the devil was their master and they had no relationship with God the Father like Abraham did and like He did. I would say that would be rather offensive, but the gospel seems to offend us to alertness before it heals us. Jesus wanted them to have a new Master, Himself. He was inviting them to become His disciples and to experience the spiritual freedom of salvation that only He could provide.

III. Who do you say Jesus is?

> *Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.*
> ***-John 8:56-59***

Have you ever seen a speaker make a room so mad that people started yelling or walking out? When I was attending Bible College, I remember a guest speaker so thoroughly offending students that many of them left the room, some argued with him, others audibly groaned in annoyance or disgust and a chapel service at the end of the week had to be dedicated to calming down the student body.

In most modern contexts, Jesus is presented as having a very mild, almost bland personality. But that's not what the gospels reveal about Him. In this context, He riled up the crowd He was speaking to, to the point they attempted to kill Him.

Speaking in the natural sense, Jesus said that their father Abraham rejoiced at seeing the day of the coming of Jesus the Messiah. Abraham had been promised descendants and according to the traditional teaching of the rabbis, Abraham was given insight about the future of those who would come through him. This would imply that Abraham foresaw the coming of Jesus by faith and was glad about it.

> *These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar,*
> ***-Hebrews 11:13a***

But this wasn't on the mind of the crowd. They were stuck thinking in natural, not supernatural terms and they questioned how Abraham could have seen Jesus' coming since they lived in different eras of time. Then Jesus popped their bubble again by revealing to them that He existed before Abraham and that He in fact was the "I AM" which is an Old Testament reference for the self-existent, eternal God.

> *Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to*

them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'"
-Exodus 3:13-14

The Old Testament also taught that if anyone blasphemed the name of the LORD, they should be put to death by stoning and that's what they believed Jesus had just done, so they attempted to kill Him.

Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him.
-Leviticus 24:16a

But what they were failing to realize was that everything Jesus was telling them was true. He is Lord. He is God. He is Master. He is Savior. But their actions were visible proof of their rejection of the idea of Him serving in that role in their lives.

And this begs an important question. Who do we say Jesus is? Is He our God, Savior and Lord? Do our lives confirm that?

- A true disciple of Christ is faithful to His word.
- The life of a disciple demonstrates who they subject themselves to as their master.
- A disciple comes to the point where they wrestle with the question, "Who is Jesus?"

He is who He says He is and He loves us too much to be content with watching us remain in slavery to the fallen mindset, values and practices of this word. He has called us to find new life and freedom in Him and His hand is reaching out to you and to me to lift us up and unto Himself.

Chapter 4

A Disciple Has a Growing Appreciation of Christ's Love

I. Christ will make you clean

> *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.*
> ***-John 15:1-3***

I don't eat enough fruit, but among the fruits I enjoy, I particularly appreciate fruits that are "convenient" to eat. Two of the most convenient fruits to eat, in my opinion, are bananas and grapes. Bananas come pre-portioned and wrapped and are easy to open. Grapes are conveniently "bite-sized" and don't require much preparation to serve and eat. The region where my wife grew up is filled with grape vineyards so she is quite fond of the plants. And when you look through the Scriptures, you can quickly find multiple instances where the Lord uses grape vines to illustrate His relationship with His people and the fruitfulness of their lives.

Jesus describes Himself in this passage as the "true vine" and He speaks of the Father as the "vinedresser." Part of what He's communicating here is that He is the source of our life and sustenance and the Father is actively at work shaping and pruning our lives so we can become abundantly fruitful.

Beyond that, people often debate the meaning of these verses. We're told here that every branch in Christ that does not bear fruit is taken away by the Father, but every fruitful branch is pruned to make it more fruitful. Without going into the various interpretations of these verses, let me state that I believe that Jesus is indicating that those who are truly connected to Him by faith will continue to grow and good things will be produced by God through them. Those who are just going through the motions, but don't truly believe (like Judas Iscariot), will become evident and will be taken away. This passage is a helpful group of verses to us that can help prompt us to take a personal assessment of the genuineness of our belief in Christ.

Jesus is going to speak more about fruitfulness in the coming verses, but please notice what He wants His disciples to understand regarding how they are viewed in His eyes. He tells them, "*Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.*" What do you supposed Jesus was trying to communicate by saying that?

The true disciples who accepted what Jesus taught were forgiven and cleansed from their sin. It was no longer held against them. They were no longer viewed by God as sinners who were outside of His eternal family. They were clean. They were holy in His sight. They were loved. And if you have genuine faith in Christ, you are also clean, forgiven and loved by Him.

Do you think this is worth knowing? Does this truth make any difference in a person's life?

I have a friend who calls himself "scumbag" and has that word tattooed across his hand. He grew up in a harsh context. Grace, mercy and forgiveness were hard to come by in his childhood. I wonder if he struggles with feeling loved. I wonder if that's how he truly sees himself and if that is how he believes God sees him. I wonder how many of his self-destructive behaviors and seasons of depression and discouragement can be tied to his lack of feeling forgiven and cleansed.

I wonder how many of us are still wrestling with the very same thing.

II. Christ will make your life fruitful

> *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you,ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*
> ***-John 15:4-8***

What do you hope the outcome of your life will be? I have heard several theologians state that the goal of their lives was to *"preach the gospel, die and be forgotten."* I appreciate that sentiment, but let's be more specific than that. What do you hope will be the outcome of what your time is invested in? What do you hope will be the outcome of the relationships you cultivate? What are your long-term hopes for your spouse, kids, grandchildren and beyond? What do you want Jesus to do in and through your life?

Jesus tells us here to abide in Him. Abiding in Him is the fruit of a relationship with Him where you're convinced of His love and care. To abide in Him means to continually trust in Him and rely on Him in all circumstances while you follow Him. And He assures us that He will remain with us in the midst of our earthly struggles.

Good things are produced in the life of a man or woman who abides in Christ. When we're connected to Him, we're tied in to the greatest power in the universe and His power flows through us. We can't produce lasting spiritual fruit apart from Him, but He will produce things in our lives that have lasting value if we continue to abide in Him. He will produce increasing faith, genuine love, courage to face fears, a willingness to share His gospel with others, the ability to follow His teaching, the strength to resist temptation, and lasting hope that cannot be ruined by our momentary trials and circumstances.

He will also produce a legacy of faith in the lives of those who observe His work in our lives. Our spouses, children and friends will testify to the power of God they saw at work within us. They will testify to the clear ways Jesus shaped us

and transformed us. A life connected to Jesus is a fruitful life indeed. Lasting good will come from a life that He is empowering and directing.

Not long ago, I attended an event that was put together to encourage pastors and church leaders. The evening sessions were being taught by a friend of mine and he was speaking about international missions and discipleship. At one point, he put a picture up on the screen of a woman named Grace who has served in Guatemala for more than 50 years.

Years ago, Grace taught a Sunday School class in New England. My friend's sister used to go to that class, but his parents weren't interested in things like that. In time, Grace taught her about Jesus and she came to faith in Him and grew very excited about Him. Her enthusiasm rubbed off on her parents and they started attending services at Grace's church. Soon after, they also came to faith in Jesus and began growing fruitful as they walked with Him.

In time, my friend's father began to sense that Christ was calling him into pastoral ministry and he answered that call. Eventually, that call led him to Northeast Pennsylvania where he served for 14 years as the pastor in a town called Jermyn.

When I was 8-years-old, my family was invited to attend that church and we heard the gospel there. The church paid for me to attend Summer camp and I trusted in Jesus while I was there, then the people of that church made continual investments in my growth in Christ.

My point in sharing all of that is to point out that Grace probably doesn't realize just how much fruit Jesus has produced from her life. At the time she taught a small Sunday School class, she never would have predicted the cluster of grapes that Jesus would produce through her life and testimony. But that's precisely what He wants to do through you and me as we abide in Him.

As my friend spoke, I was amazed when it occurred to me that a part of my walk with Christ could be traced back to that small class that met decades ago in New England.

III. Christ loves you with the deepest possible love

> *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."*
> ***-John 15:9-11***

What motivates you to want to be a disciple of Jesus? Is it fear or is it love? A mature disciple of Christ grows in their appreciation of Christ's love and they begin to realize He loves them with the deepest possible love. That's exactly what He was communicating here.

To what degree do you believe God the Father loves God the Son, Jesus Christ? A little? A lot? More so than we can quantify? Knowing that the Father loves the Son with the deepest love possible, what do you think about the statement Christ makes about His love for us? He says, "*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.*" Is that a reality you're willing to come to terms with? Is that a fact you're willing to allow your heart to dwell on, on your worst days when all you really feel like doing is condemning yourself?

> *By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.*
> ***-1 John 3:19-20***

A fully devoted follower of Christ abides in His love. We live each day confident of it. Our decisions are motivated by it. It's not God's ultimate desire that we keep His commandments because of fear. His desire is that we would agree with Him, confident that He has our best interest at heart, and follow what He says because we know He speaks in love. When we abide in His love, we delight to keep His word.

The fruit of this kind of loving relationship with Christ is joy that isn't dependent on circumstances. Jesus said, "*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*" Joy is better than happiness. It's a state of true contentment in Christ that isn't ruined by trials or momentary circumstances. I don't know what this year has looked like for you so far. It's

probably had some trials as well as some fun. But if we're abiding in the love of Christ, we will experience the fulness of joy when He is on our minds and in our hearts.

If you come to Christ by faith, He will make you clean, He will make your life fruitful, and He will show you in countless ways that He loves you with the deepest love possible.

Chapter 5

A Disciple Shows Love to Other Disciples

I. Love one another with Christ-inspired love

> *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*
> ***-John 13:34-35***

Love is a word that we use with regularity, but we often mean several different things by it. Sometimes we use that word to describe something that we really enjoy. Other times we use that word when we're describing something that brings us comfort like, "I love the weather when it isn't humid." But Jesus is using the term "love" in a much deeper way than it commonly is used in the English language.

Jesus is speaking about a kind of love that reflects His heart toward humanity and when He uses the term "love" in this passage, He is speaking about an action, not merely a feeling. He's encouraging His disciples to practice love. Specifically, He's commanding us to seek what is best for one another, even at great personal cost to ourselves.

It's interesting to me that He starts this statement by telling His disciples He was giving them a "new commandment." When we think about biblical commandments, our minds probably start thinking about the 10 Commandments that are listed in Exodus 20. In that passage, the Lord told us we shouldn't have any other gods, but Him, we shouldn't worship idols, we shouldn't use His name in vain, we shouldn't murder, we shouldn't steal from each other, we shouldn't covet or commit adultery, we should honor our parents, and several other important commands about human interaction. If we summarized the first four commandments, we could say that they were telling us to love God. And the other six commandments followed that by showing us how we can love other people.

But Jesus describes His teaching here as a "new commandment." Again, I find that interesting because the commandments of Scripture have always been about loving God and loving people, but there's something new about what Jesus is teaching His disciples that we would be wise to observe.

> *Jesus replied, "'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart,*

all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."
-Matthew 22:37-40, NLT

Jesus was teaching and commanding His followers to love one another **just as He has loved us** and that in doing so, **the world would know that we are His disciples**. You see, Jesus is concerned that our lives would point others toward Him and the truth is, people are going to believe what they see in your life, particularly when you're under stress or opposition, before they're going to consider your words credible.

Jesus tells us here to love one another like He has loved us. What does that mean? What does that look like? How has Jesus loved us and how can we replicate that love?

- Jesus forsook His comfort to suffer for us.
- He speaks the truth in love.
- He builds us up.
- He reminds us of His desire to have a relationship with us.
- He gives us His time.
- He meets our needs.
- He keeps His promises.

If we model this toward each other, what kind of impact will that have on our lives? If we model that for our spouses, children, parents and friends, how will that affect them? Will others be prompted to worship Jesus after observing the nature of His love flowing through us?

II. Lay down your life for those you love

> *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.*
> ***-John 15:12-15***

I have the privilege to meet with people regularly for pastoral counseling. It's truly a privilege, particularly when people are willing to implement healthy actions afterward. One of my favorite forms of counseling is marriage counseling and when I'm meeting with a couple before they get married, we always talk a little about finances and I often like to ask them a few trick questions like this, "How much does it cost me to buy something from the Dollar Menu at McDonald's?" They usually stare at me for a moment because they can tell it's a trick question, then they answer, "One dollar?" And I answer them, "No, it costs me six dollars. If I'm buying dinner for me, I'm also buying for my wife and four kids."

The majority of my time, energy and money, at this point in my life, isn't being spent on me. It's being spent on my family. That is one of the biggest life changes I experienced when I became married and started having children. But, truthfully, it has been a healthy change. It has produced growth in my life and continues to stretch me in healthy ways that I may not have sought otherwise.

Many marriages, friendships and other relationships suffer in this world because of adopting and living out a "me-centered" perspective. If you're a disciple of Jesus, He doesn't want you to adopt a "me-centered" perspective. He invites you and empowers you to adopt a completely different mindset. He invites you to love others like He loves others and He says, "*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*"

There are a few different ways to apply what Jesus says here. I think the most obvious application is the concept of sacrificing your physical life for the welfare of someone else. In our culture, we can see examples of our military or law enforcement officers doing that regularly. I know of people who have received organ donations from family members that were thinking of this verse

when they donated. I heard of a story not too long ago of a mother who drowned while saving the life of her child. And we see the greatest example of all in Christ's sacrifice of His life for us on the cross.

But I believe this Scripture also applies in circumstances that don't require physical death. If I tell my wife that I love her, but never honor her preferences, have I really laid down my life for her? If I tell my children that I love them, but they grow up feeling low on my list of priorities, have I really laid down my life for them? If I tell my parents I love them, but don't honor them or attempt to help them as they age, have I really laid down my life for them?

Christ calls us His friends and if we enjoy that kind of relationship with Him, we're challenged to lay down our lives for our friends, our family, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

III. Ask for what you need from the Lord to accomplish this mission

> *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*
> ***-John 15:16-17***

If you could have observed my family closely last Summer, you would probably have noticed something curious. When we went anywhere in our van, we had to open the trunk and let the kids enter through the back. This was because the center rollers on the side doors broke on both sides of the vehicle. So, I did a little research online and discovered that I could fix both doors myself. I already owned the tools, so I simply ordered the replacement parts online. When the parts arrived, I made the repairs and we were able to use the van normally again.

In the spiritual sense, Christ gives us what we need to accomplish the mission He has entrusted to us. We have the tools. We have the power. We can ask Him for His wisdom and He will grant it to us as well. It is the desire of the God of all creation that our lives would produce lasting fruit that gives Him glory and He has promised us in these verses that He will supply what we need for that mission to be accomplished.

Jesus invites us to make requests of God the Father in these verses. When we pray, what do we typically as the Lord for? Many of our requests tend to come back to asking God to relieve us or someone we love from suffering OR to increase our level of comfort on this earth. And yet, Jesus invites us to make requests of the Father in His name. What do you think? Is Jesus telling us that whatever we want will be granted to us if we pray for it? If I keep asking God for creature comforts and less suffering, will He automatically say yes?

The truth is, Jesus isn't asking us to pray with a selfish mindset. He's asking us to pray in the same spirit as what He has been speaking of -- the mindset of Christ-centered love and laying down your life for others. And He's told us that this is our mission as His disciples, so now He's reminding us that we can ask the Father for what we need to accomplish this mission, in the name of Jesus.

What are we going to need for this to happen? What do we truly need for us to be able to love one another like Christ has loved us? We are going to need faith,

grace and mercy. We are going to need power, wisdom and compassion. We are going to need self-control, strength and a willingness to be involved in the lives of others. And the truth is, we can't rely on ourselves to provide this. The provisions we need for the mission Christ has called us to can only be supplied by the Spirit of God, but thankfully, Christ assures us that's exactly what He wants to supply. So since His answer is already yes, He assures us that we can confidently make that kind of request of God.

A fully devoted follower of Christ shows love to others. It's a love that reflects the sacrificial heart of Christ and is empowered by God so that the fruit of that action has lasting value and impact.

Chapter 6

A Disciple Seeks Opportunities to Share their Faith in Christ

I. Sometimes you teach and sometimes you proclaim

> *And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.*
> ***-Acts 4:1-4***

In Chapter 3 of the book of Acts, the Lord healed a crippled beggar through Peter and John. This was an astounding sight to the people who witnessed this take place and Peter used this opportunity to help the people understand that it was through the power of Jesus Christ, received through faith, that this man was healed. Large crowds started gathering to hear Peter preach and he encouraged them all to repent of their unbelief and place their trust in Jesus because He is the only one who can grant salvation.

The Scripture tells us here that Peter and John were communicating in two ways. They were **teaching** the people and they were **proclaiming** the resurrection of the dead through Jesus. The words teaching and proclaiming catch my attention as I look at this passage because if we are going to share our faith in Christ with others, there are likely going to be times where we're asked to do one or the other, or both. And in practice, I think there can be a slight difference between the two.

Teaching is something I enjoy. One of my favorite hours of the week is the Bible study I teach on Tuesday nights at our church. We discuss the Scriptures. I present them, try to give historical background, and answer questions that come up from the group. It's interactive. It's light-hearted, and I believe it helps us as a group to understand the Scriptures better so we can have a better understanding of the Lord who is the Author of the Scriptures.

Proclaiming tends to be a slightly different form of communication. When you proclaim something, you're announcing a statement of belief. You're making a proclamation of something you believe to be true. It's an effective form of communication, but it doesn't typically involve dialogue. Preaching is a form of proclamation. Some people prefer learning in a context of proclamation. Others

prefer learning in a more teaching-centered context. Both are valuable and both have their place in the communication of the gospel to others.

Jesus used both approaches during His earthly ministry. Peter followed that example, as did the other apostles. We're told here that Peter and John experienced some opposition from local religious authorities as they communicated the gospel (the Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection), but just the same, thousands of people came to faith in Christ as the gospel was intentionally made known. The church began growing rapidly.

Which approach do you prefer to take when sharing about your faith? Do you prefer conversation? Teaching a small group in an interactive setting? Making a proclamation to a crowd? Writing or typing the message? All are valuable approaches and every single one is infinitely more valuable than not saying anything. Sometimes we teach. Sometimes we proclaim because a growing disciple of Christ desires to share their hope with others.

II. Let your words point to Jesus (v. 5-12)

> *On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*
> ***-Acts 4:5-12***

The Scriptures encourage us in many places to verbally share our faith in Christ with others. We're told that this is God's ordained method for His gospel to spread and that without people to speak the truth, people will unfortunately not hear it.

> *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?*
> ***-Romans 10:14***

I point that out not to foster a feeling of guilt if you feel like this isn't something you regularly do, but to encourage you to make sure that when you speak, your words point to Jesus.

I had a very awkward experience once when I was a freshman in college. The band, The Grateful Dead, was coming to Philadelphia to play a concert and we knew there was a whole culture of people that travelled with them. Many people didn't even go into the show, they just hung out in the parking lot doing drugs. Well, we decided to drive to the concert so we could share the gospel with the people in the parking lot.

At one point a large crowd gathered around us as we were being ridiculed by a homeless man. He started yelling at us, "Will your God put food in my belly?!!!" He wasn't interested in talking with us and we weren't interested in arguing with him, but we were trying to point him and others to Christ with the words that we spoke and the ways in which we communicated.

The Scripture here tells us that Peter and John were brought before the religious rulers in Jerusalem. This, by the way, was the same ruling council that condemned Jesus to death. And they were questioned as to what name, or by what power they had performed this miracle. It always strikes me as odd that in cases like this, you have these hard-hearted leaders failing to share the joy of the healed man. They wanted control. They wanted compliance and they weren't happy that crucifying Jesus didn't end all the talk about Him and the displays of His power in Jerusalem.

Peter responded to their questioning and I appreciate the fact that the Scripture tells us the Holy Spirit filled him, guiding the words he would say and how he would say them. Peter spoke plainly, clearly and piercingly. He made it clear that this miracle was done in the power of Jesus, the same Jesus they crucified and God raised from the dead. And He also made clear that salvation can be found only through Jesus.

A teacher once told me that *"an immature person speaks before they think and a mature person thinks before they speak."* I believe that's true and I think there's an application for us as believers. The words we speak and the manner in which we speak should point others to Jesus. As we submit ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit, He will give us the words to say. He will use us to **encourage, challenge, inspire, edify, counsel and instruct**. He will speak through us like He demonstrated through Peter and will point others to Christ through what we say, as we submit our words and hearts to Him.

III. Let your demeanor testify to the depth of your relationship with Jesus

> *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying,"What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name."*
> ***-Acts 4:13-17***

I'm friends with people who have many different beliefs and backgrounds. Some know the Lord and many do not. From time to time, I like to ask questions on Facebook to see what my friends think and believe about various subjects and I wonder what kind of answer I would get if I asked this question, **"What are Christians like?"** I'm sure I would get all kinds of answers. Some would have positive things to say. Others might have a negative response. Some would stereotype. Others might share personal examples that influenced their opinion.

There are professing Christians in this world that I deeply admire. In general, they tend to be even-tempered people who are a nice blend of honesty, integrity, action, and compassion. Likewise, there are professing Christians in this world that I don't admire. They are hot-headed, argumentative, selfish, self-righteous and needlessly critical. None of us is perfect and we're all at different places in our spiritual maturity, but I believe our demeanor and the way we interact with others should convey the nature of our relationship with Christ.

That appears to have been the case with Peter and John. The upper crust elites that stood in judgement over them were astonished at what they were seeing in them. Though they had no formal training, they spoke so clearly and confidently. And it became abundantly clear that these were the men who had spent time with, been trained by and were empowered by Jesus. The leaders couldn't even deny that a great sign had been performed through them, so their only response was to order them to shut up. To stop speaking about Jesus and leading others toward faith in Him. But Peter and John refused to stop teaching

and proclaiming.

Can people see Christ in us? I want that answer to be yes. I want people to see the presence of Jesus in my life. I want people to see the presence of Jesus in your life. Our demeanor can be a useful tool in His mission to rescue humanity or we can waste the opportunity He has given us to model His work in our hearts. A growing disciple of Christ looks for opportunities to share their hope with others through proclaiming and teaching, with words and a demeanor that point people to Jesus, the light of the world.

When Benjamin Franklin wished to interest the people of Philadelphia in street lighting, he didn't try to persuade them by just talking about it. He hung a beautiful lantern on a long bracket in front of his home. He kept the glass highly polished. Every evening at the approach of dusk, he carefully lit the wick. People saw the light from a distance and when they walked in its light, found that it helped them to avoid sharp stones on the pavement. Others placed light at their homes, and soon Philadelphia recognized the need for street lighting. I can't help but wonder if others, when they observe the peace and joy we have in our lives because of Christ, will begin to recognize their need for Him and invite us to share the hope He has placed within us.

-Source Unknown, Bible.org

> *Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.*
> ***-1 Peter 3:15, NLT***

Chapter 7
A Disciple Takes up their Cross

I. Take up your cross, deny yourself and follow Christ

> *And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*
> ***-Luke 9:23***

If I had the ability to convince the entire world of how wonderful it is to follow Christ, I would do it. If I could wave a wand or change people's minds over night, I would take that opportunity. But that's not how it works and the truth is, when we share about following Christ, we often speak of the experience in a more glamorous or flowery way than even Christ does.

When we look at this passage, we can see that Jesus wasn't glamorizing what it would look like to follow Him. He speaks of the journey in hard terms. He tells us exactly what it will look like and He raises the bar of expectations for the church.

Many of the people who showed interest in Him during His earthly ministry were looking at Jesus primarily through a political lens. Some wanted to follow Him because they were certain He was going to raise the nation of Israel to a place of prominence like it enjoyed under King David. But Jesus isn't speaking of following Him in those kinds of terms in these verses. He tells those within His hearing that "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*" That's the reality of following Christ.

In 2008, my family moved to Langhorne, Pennsylvania to replant a local church that had died. I remember during the early years of our church when we first introduced "church membership", I would often get questions like, "Why should I become a member? What's in it for me?" And I would usually say, "Nothing. It isn't a ticket to special privileges. It's an opportunity to raise your level of commitment to Christ's mission through our local church."

If we're honest, we frequently evaluate things in this world through the lens of the question, "What's in it for me?" Yet when we look at these verses, we can see that Jesus was encouraging the opposite perspective. He said His followers would have to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him. Frankly speaking, Jesus was encouraging a healthier perspective on life than what we naturally tend to seek.

Jesus teaches us to deny ourselves. This doesn't mean to punish, starve or demean ourselves, but it does mean that we should let go of our selfish desires and the constant search for earthly security that competes with Christ's invitation to walk by faith in Him.

Jesus teaches us to take up our cross. In saying this, He's inviting us to assess the depth of our commitment to Him. Would we be willing to suffer persecution for His name? Would we follow Jesus, even to the point of death? Jesus is telling us that there's no turning back when we become His disciples. We must be willing to be a social outcast, oppressed, ostracized, or more if it ever comes to that. The truth is, you'll never impact another life for Christ if you just go with the flow of culture anyway.

Jesus teaches us to follow Him. Belief in Christ is where discipleship starts, but it continues and grows deeper as we daily follow Christ. Our life needs to be going in the same direction as His. He calls us to follow Him and journey through life confident of His presence, power, wisdom and encouragement that He will continually pour into us.

II. How is a life truly saved?

> *For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?*
> ***-Luke 9:24-25***

What are we trying to hold on to in this world? It can be an unsettling thought when we let ourselves start thinking about the fact that everything in this world we try to hold on to can and will be taken away at some point.

I serve as a chaplain for the Fire Marshall's office in our township and now, several times each year, I'm called on to meet with and counsel families after they lose all their earthly possessions in house fires. I can tell you that universally, it's a devastating experience for them. But what do we have in this world that can't be taken away or lost?

What about our own lives? How long can we even hold on to them? There was a news report not long ago that stated that under present conditions, researchers believe that our bodies can not live beyond 115 years. So, physically speaking, can we ever really save our lives or would it be more accurate to say that we're doing our best to delay the inevitable.

Jesus was trying to help those who were in His hearing to grasp these concepts and more. He knows that the natural inclination of the human heart is to try to hold on to that which we can't hold on to and then to feel anxious about the fact that we can't control most things in this world. Jesus said, "*For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.*" Life isn't about trying to hold on to the short-sighted best for yourself. If the goal of your life is earthly rewards and earthly security, you're going to be greatly disappointed in the end.

I was recently told by a friend who grew up in Mexico about raiding parties that came through Mexico City, centuries ago, and some of the raiders who sought to escape carrying gold were willing to drown instead of letting go of the gold they raided when they had to pass through deep water. The life of a disciple is not about selfishly seeking to hold on to this world's best.

In speaking the words He shares in this passage, Jesus is asking us to give up

something that by design, we could never keep and to exchange it for something that can be enjoyed and experienced forever. The life of a disciple, a fully devoted follower of Christ, is marked by joy in knowing that if you have Christ, you have everything you truly need. If you have Christ, you don't need to find a sense of worth, validation or security in things that can and will go away one day.

Well known missionary, Jim Elliot, is often quoted as having said, *"He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."* Jim Elliot was speaking of the exchange that a disciple makes. We give up our worship of that which can never save us and follow Christ and worship Him, confident of the fact He will never leave us.

There is nothing in this world worth trading our souls for. In Christ, our lives are forever saved.

III. Will we see the kingdom of God? (v. 26-27)

> *For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."*
> ***-Luke 9:26-27***

When you're reading the Gospels, it becomes quite clear that among Christ's disciples and the population at large, there was a strong craving for national independence and a powerful kingdom in Israel. It was a regular topic of conversation and something many people were fired up about.

Jesus is the ultimate King and He rules and reigns over an eternal kingdom. But will we see that kingdom? Will we be part of it? As Christ explains things here, some people will see His kingdom while others won't have the privilege of being part of it.

The way Christ describes things here is by using the word, "ashamed." He says, "*For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*" In one sense, we might interpret what He was saying, assuming that He speaking of embarrassment, but there's more to it than that. My understanding is that Jesus is using this term in a similar fashion as is shared in **Romans 1:16**.

> *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*
> ***-Romans 1:16***

What I think Jesus is getting at is that if we regret or consider it a mistake to be connected to Him by faith, we can therefore be confident that we will not be part of His kingdom. But if we are part of His family through trusting in Him to forgive our sin, grant us new life and empower us daily, we can be confident of the fact that we will have a rich welcome into His kingdom. He is not and will not be ashamed of us. He does not and will not regret His decision to bring us into His eternal family.

And Jesus makes a point to say to His followers that some of them would in fact see the kingdom of God before they died. There are at least two possible explanations of what Jesus was speaking about here.

Possibility 1: Peter, James and John would witness the transfiguration 8 days later would be "seeing the kingdom of God"

Possibility 2: The kingdom of God is growing all around us as Christ builds His church and the Holy Spirit draws people unto Him while producing fruit in their lives because the Kingdom of God is love, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit.

For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
-Romans 14:17

Christ invites us to be His disciples who take up our cross, deny ourselves and follow Him. And we rejoice because His true disciples are granted new life in Him that can never be taken away and will be welcomed into His eternal kingdom forever.

"There are no crown-wearers in heaven who were not cross-bearers here below."
-Charles Spurgeon

"We need men of the cross, with the message of the cross, bearing the marks of the cross."
- Vance Havner

Chapter 8
A Disciple Counts the Cost

I. What is your greatest love?

> *Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*
> ***-Luke 14:25-27***

Have you ever been in the midst of a large crowd? I remember about a year after my wife and I were married, we visited New England in the Fall and we happened to be in Boston the night the Red Sox won a playoff game. We got on board the train to head back to where we were staying and all of a sudden, the train filled beyond capacity with a rush of people who had just left the game. We had to stand so close to each other that you couldn't move or lift your arms. We were entertained by it all, but if you are claustrophobic, it would have been torture.

When we look at this Scripture, we're told that at this point in His earthly ministry, great crowds were following Jesus. He was still popular among the people and word of His teaching and miracles had been spreading. It's possible that if you were to ask this group of people if they considered themselves disciples of Jesus, they may have said "yes", but Jesus spoke to them in such a way as to make it clear that discipleship isn't a casual or flippant concept.

There are books dedicated to "the hard sayings of Jesus" and one of those sayings is mentioned in these verses. As Jesus spoke to this group of casual followers, He intentionally provoked them by using hyperbole in the way He spoke. He gave an example of the cost of being His disciple that wasn't meant to be taken in a hyper-literal sense, but it was meant to illustrate a very real concept.

Jesus said, "*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.*" That certainly would get a crowds attention, particularly if they had been listening to the rest of what He had been teaching. Even today, some people find these verses perplexing and at first glance, that may be what Jesus intended to happen because it's obvious from His other teachings and the totality of God's word that we are to love our parents, spouses, children and

ourselves. Scripture even teaches that if a man won't provide for his family, he shouldn't even call himself a Christian.

> *But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*
> ***-1 Timothy 5:8***

But comparatively speaking, Jesus is saying that our love for Him is to be our greatest love. All other expressions of love cannot compare to its depth. Not love for family or love for self. Nothing.

In a sense, this may have been said to test this group of casual observers. Even today, local churches have lots of casual observers, but tests like Jesus communicates here have a way of revealing what's really in a person's heart.

Jesus also makes reference again, as He has in other passages, to the concept of bearing our cross and following Him. It seems that He's making a point show that He isn't inviting us to something that has earthly glamour. And if our greatest love is earthly glamour, then it's fair to say we don't really understand yet what it means to love Jesus.

II. We invest in what we love most (v. 28-30)

> *For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'*
> ***-Luke 14:28-30***

I love looking through old pictures of my family and I have a habit of taking a lot of pictures. I noticed that I have 37,200 pictures currently stored online and I'm adding to that regularly. But I was looking through pictures recently from when we first bought our house and were moving in. I was able to afford our home because it needed work and the relocation company that owned it was willing to drastically reduce the price. The pictures reminded me, however, of the many projects we've done to repair and update the house since we bought it and I can't help but think about the cost of each of those improvements, including the $6,400 I paid to replace our furnace.

I'm not a big fan of expensive repairs or really anything that costs me a lot of money. And if we are honest with ourselves, which do we tend to find more appealing, the thought of getting something or the thought of a costly expense? Under typical circumstances, we usually prefer getting or receiving something, but Jesus reminds His followers here that there is a cost involved in following Him and He uses a very simple example to drive the point home that most people could understand. He speaks of a building project.

The first, and most obvious step to a building project is figuring out if it's affordable to complete. How much will materials cost? How much will labor cost? What about insurance and permits? Jesus said that an incomplete building project results in mockery when people see a foundation in place, but nothing sitting on it because it wasn't funded. The cost wasn't properly evaluated.

The crowds that were following Jesus at this point weren't following Him to give something, share something, or to spend something. They were following Him because they wanted to get something. This was a common problem among the crowds that followed Him during that day (and it's also a problem that is present among modern day believers as well).

> *When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus answered them,“Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."*
> ***-John 6:25-26***

But Jesus makes clear that there is a price we will pay to follow Him closely and sincerely. What is that price? Is it financial? Relational? Experiential? Emotional? Will there be a return on this investment or is that the wrong question?

Let's be honest, there is a cost to follow Jesus, but the investment will be worth it forever. The truth is, we always invest in what matters most to us. Our time, energy, money and other resources are directed toward and used for what we care most deeply about. Once we become fully convinced of the love, compassion and presence of Christ in our lives, the social or experiential costs don't phase us quite as much. There is nothing and no one we need more than Christ and He is worth the investment of our lives being that He is the source of both our natural life and eternal life.

III. Is there anything we would not give up for Christ?

> *Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*
> ***-Luke 14:31-33***

For quite a few years, my grandfather smoked, but in his late 50's, he had a heart-attack. He survived, but his doctor told him, *"If you aren't going to quit smoking, don't bother to ask me to treat you."* So my grandfather gave up smoking.

One afternoon, he was holding a white BIC pen in his hand like you would hold a cigarette. My father mistook it for a cigarette and smacked it out of his fingers. They laughed about it, but my grandfather often said that smoking was quite difficult for him to give up.

Jesus was trying to help those that were following Him to understand that they would be called upon to give up their worship or over-reliance on earthly temporary and earthly things if they wanted to become serious about following Him. And He gave another example to drive the point home as to whether or not they had truly considered the cost of following Him.

Jesus spoke of a king going off to war. In the example, the kind needed to carefully think through what he was doing before he did it. Would it be worth it? Was this really what he wanted to do? Did the king understand what this decision would mean for him and his people? Was he prepared for what may come next as a result. What was he willing to sacrifice to get the result he wanted?

Christ's example was meant to prompt some introspection. Jesus was confronting the idols of our hearts. There are things in this world that don't look like idols to us, but that's exactly what they are. They look like objects of beauty or utility, but in many instances, they become objects of worship. And we can do a little test on them to see if they are objects of utility or objects of worship. The test is this: would you be willing to live without them?

Would you be willing to live without your **reputation**?

Would you be willing to live without your **career** or is your identity too tied up in it?

What is **off limits** to Jesus if He asks you to give it up in the process of following Him and walking the path He directs for your life?

Carolyn Arends recorded a great song in the mid-90's called "Seize the Day" that still gets stuck in my mind. There's one stanza that always resonated with me, and this is what it says;

Well I know a doctor, a fine young physician
Left his six figure job for a mission position
He's healing the sick in an African village
He works in the dirt and writes home to the cynics
He says "We work through the night almost everyday
As we watch the sun rise we can say....
Sieze the day."
-Carolyn Arends, "Sieze the Day"

I don't know if Jesus will or will not actually ask us to give up anything in particular, but His words here drive home an important point. If there truly is anything we believe is more important in our lives than Him, we aren't yet His disciples. And the truth is, unless He comes first, we won't truly be able to love our families or ourselves with the kind of love they should receive.

The path to contentment and satisfaction is a path that finds fulfillment in Jesus. He truly is all we need. We rob ourselves of joy and contentment in life when we give the affections of our hearts over to lesser things that may seem important in the moment, but absolutely won't seem important from the perspective of eternity. You'll be alive 10,000 years from now and so will I and I like to ask myself, *"Will I still care about this then? What will I be able to say truly mattered?"*

Chapter 9

A Disciple Joyfully Invests in their Ongoing Growth

I. God is fostering the desire within you to please Him

> *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*
> ***-Philippians 2:12-13***

Working with children can be such a joy. Not long ago, my family went out to eat and we ran into two children that attend the mid-week children's program at our church. They were thrilled to see us and wanted to tell us everything they could about how their day was going and what kind of crafts they were working on. We could see in their faces that they were eager for our approval, so we were sure to express it.

Like a child who loves a parent is eager to please that parent, so too does God foster within His children the desire to please Him and Paul speaks about that in this passage written to the church at Philippi.

The Christians who lived in Philippi brought the Apostle Paul great joy. They were living in a city that was known for it's paganism and unbelief, but even in the midst of that context, Paul was encouraging the church to shine like lights in a place that was shrouded with such darkness.

He encouraged them to live out their faith, not just when he was present to observe and instruct them, but also while he was away. This would be with an understanding that their ultimate accountability was to Jesus who was present with them always. And he uses the phrase "*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*,". What does that mean?

Quite some time ago, I read that Philippi had at one time been a mining community and the term "work out" was a mining term that meant "bring something to the surface" like you would be doing if you were mining for gold or other precious materials. Paul was encouraging the church not to bury the visible effects of their salvation, but to bring them out to the surface so they can been seen and experienced by others - giving them the opportunity to observe the impact and powerful change Jesus Christ had made in their lives.

Paul reminded them that the Lord Himself was seeking to produce this kind of

activity in their lives. He said, "*for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*" It is the Lord who would create the desire within these believers to please Him and He would likewise empower them with the supernatural strength to do so.

This is an important thing to notice if we desire to be growing Christians with a deep and abiding walk in Christ. We are not being called to live out the Christian life by our own will-power. Living in the power of our limited will produces a spirit of legalism, self-righteousness, comparison and judgmentalism. And that likewise produces division and discord.

Rather, we're called to live in continual dependence and reliance on the power of Christ to work in us and through us to please Him with our lives. As we live with this reliance on Christ's power, we will see and experience a deepening desire within our hearts to please our Lord.

II. Hold fast to the Word of Life

> *Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.*
> ***-Philippians 2:14-18***

Not long ago, I had the experience of having to deal with someone who is a real downer. I'm sure we all know people like that - people with the tendency to bring others down. We all know people who can be rather unpleasant to interact with and an emotional drain. A characteristic of such a personality is often the continual practice of grumbling, complaining and arguing. It's gets old quickly.

As the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to pen theses words, He called the church not to practice a life or mindset that was characterized by grumbling, disputing or complaining. He reminded them that they were in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, but they didn't need to adopt the mindset or behavior of their culture. He was, on the contrary, encouraging them to stand out. To shine in the midst of darkness with the light of Christ.

I need to confess that even though this Scripture encourages us not to grumble and complain, there have definitely been moments in my life, even recently, when I haven't done a good job of heeding that advice. What if that become the pattern of my life or your life? What kind of impact would grumbling and disputing have on our relationships with others or on a local church and the strength of it's witness for Christ in a community?

It's tempting to complain, particularly if we may feel like we're surrounded by the darkness of an unredeemed culture, but is that the response Christ desires from us? What does He desire? This Scripture calls us to **hold fast to God's word**, not the grumblings of the old nature. As our love and appreciation for Christ and all that He has done, does and will do grows, we will begin to desire to learn more about what He has revealed and communicated in His word.

God's Word is more accessible to us than at any other point in human history. If we truly desire to be growing disciples of Christ, we need to grow in our understanding and appreciation of it. But on a practical level, in a life that's busy and surrounded with all kinds of diversions and distractions, what does it look like for us to invest in our lives with the Word of God? How can we be holding fast or holding firmly to the Word of Life?

Let me make a few practical suggestions:

- Dwell on it when you are stressed, anxious, grieving or happy
- Create simple habits that make it easy to interact with *(Put your Bible on your coffee table, read it before you check Facebook, buy a desk calendar with daily Bible verses, etc.)*
- Study the Bible or read it in community or group setting with other believers
- Make it a pattern to read a chapter out loud with your family before you watch TV
- Create ways to automatically remind yourself of the content of God's Word *(through apps, home screens, etc.)*

A disciple of Christ learns to joyfully take the Word of God and invest it into their heart, mind and life.

III. Prioritize prayer in all circumstances

> *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*
> ***-Philippians 4:4-7***

Not long ago I had the opportunity to take my youngest daughter out on the lake for an afternoon of kayaking. It was a beautiful day. The sights and smells of being out on the water were delightful. The fun we had was precious. It was the kind of day that was easy to thank God for.

Paul says here to "*Rejoice in the Lord always;*". That's good counsel, but do you suppose he really meant it? Keep in mind that Paul wasn't writing this while floating around on a beautiful lake with someone he loved. Paul was writing these words from prison. He was in prison, knowing that he would one day be executed because of his genuine faith in Jesus Christ. Yet his counsel was to rejoice in the Lord always.

How could he be so joyful while in such an unpleasant context? Well, his joy wasn't anchored in his circumstances. His joy was anchored in the person of Jesus Christ and Paul was rejoicing because he knew that Christ was coming again some day. The Lord's soon return should be a source of joy for us as well.

Worry would be a natural response for Paul or the early church, but coming to the Lord in prayer helps alleviate anxiety. Worry is a natural response for us as well, but it isn't God's will for us. Worry is not something we should welcome into our lives. It's hard to say that we trust God, but yet continue to worry that He might fail us. Worry is the fruit of preaching a false gospel to our hearts.

The antidote to worry is prayer. Prayer allows us to acknowledge what we're feeling, hand it over to God and trust Him to carry it. Paul was encouraging the church to be people of prayer. We're encouraged to be people who intentionally develop the pattern of bringing our joys, needs and anxious thoughts before the Lord.

Keep in mind that prayer doesn't need to always be about big and glorious matters. It can be about seemingly small things as well. The Lord invites us to bring everything before Him. A growing disciple of Jesus Christ will joyfully carve out time in their day to come before the Lord in prayer. They will make it one of their top priorities.

Also remember that making prayer a priority in our lives, produces growth within us because it...

- Prevents us from internalizing our struggles
- Forces us to turn our attention outside of ourself
- Invites us to unload what we've been carrying
- Fosters healthy communication between us and our Creator where He counsels and comforts our hearts.
- Produces changes in our circumstances and invites miraculous interventions
- Results in peace in our minds and hearts

Wrapping Up

In the past 9 chapters, we have been looking at what it means to be a disciple of Christ and what Scripture says about the lives of His fully devoted followers.

God's Word teaches us that...

- A disciple is called by Jesus
- A disciple puts Jesus first in all things
- A disciple obeys the words of Christ
- A disciple has a growing appreciation of Christ's love
- A disciple loves other disciples
- A disciple seeks opportunities to share their faith in Christ
- A disciple takes up their cross
- A disciple counts the cost
- A disciple joyfully invests in their ongoing growth

Christ invites you and me to become His fully devoted followers. His word explains that path to us and what it involves.

Is it our desire to follow Him?

Are we making investments in our lives that contribute to our growth in Christ?

Are we shining as His lights in a dark world?

A disciple joyfully invests in their ongoing growth with the strength and power Christ supplies and with the confidence that Christ is present with us in all circumstances.

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Some Verses on Discipleship for Encouragement and Inspiration

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 5:14-16

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Luke 14:27

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

2 Timothy 2:2

And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Acts 2:42

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Luke 9:23

And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

John 8:31-32

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Matthew 16:24-25

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Luke 6:40

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.

Luke 14:26

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:33

So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

1 Corinthians 11:1

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

John 15:8

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

John 13:15

For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

Proverbs 27:17

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

Galatians 6:6

One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches.

John 13:35

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

Galatians 5:24

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Matthew 7:21

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 10:37-39

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Mark 8:34

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

John 21:15-19

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”

2 Corinthians 5:20

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Acts 14:20-22

But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

John 13:16-17

Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Mark 3:13-15

And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.

Matthew 10:24

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.

Galatians 5:19-23

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Matthew 8:22

And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Luke 4:18-19

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Matthew 7:12

“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

John 6:68

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,

Mark 11:23

Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.

Matthew 28:19

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Matthew 9:9-13

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but

sinners.”

1 Timothy 1:5

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

Proverbs 25:21-22

If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.

Acts 20:24

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Romans 8:29-30

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also

justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Acts 6:1-2

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

John 13:16

Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

John 4:29

“Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”

John 3:16-17

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Matthew 6:33

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

1 John 3:16

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

1 Timothy 4:7-8

Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

1 Thessalonians 2:8

So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

Matthew 18:20

For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

Proverbs 17:22

A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

Revelation 7:9

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

James 3:1-2

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you

know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

John 21:21-22

When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!”

Luke 10:19

Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.

Matthew 20:26-28

It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

2 Timothy 1:6

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands,

John 1:39

He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.

Mark 3:14

And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach

Matthew 18:3-4

And said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Isaiah 50:4

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.

Proverbs 1:32

For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them;

Philippians 3:12-16

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.